

Communist party of the United States of America.

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**POWERFUL**

**UNITED**

**A. F. of L.**



# WHAT IS COMMUNISM?

by

**EARL BROWDER**

*General Sec'y Communist Party*

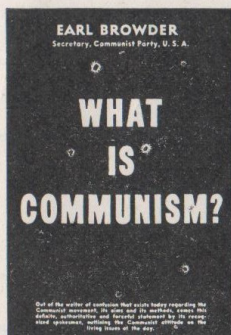
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## For a Powerful United A. F. of L.

STATEMENT OF CENTRAL COMMITTEE,  
COMMUNIST PARTY, U. S. A.

A struggle of the greatest importance to the entire American working class is now taking place within the American Federation of Labor around the issues of industrial unionism. In this struggle, the Communist Party stands firmly on the side of those progressive forces which are fighting for industrial unionism. Throughout its existence, the Communist Party fought for the organization of the working class into industrial unions. In this work, it carried on the best traditions of the progressive forces in the American labor movement, which have fought for industrial unionism ever since the rise of large-scale trustified industry.

That this issue has now become of primary importance and is agitating millions of organized and unorganized workers in the United States and Canada, that it is championed even by people who once fought the Communist Party on this and other issues, is only proof of the far-sightedness and correctness of the Communist program and tactics. The Communist Party welcomes this development in the direction of industrial unionism, which shows that the American workers are taking an important



step forward. We believe that their experiences and the work of the Communist Party will also very quickly convince these workers, and, we hope, many of their leaders, that the fight for industrial unionism must go hand in hand with the fight for a powerful party of labor and the farmers — a Farmer-Labor Party.

### **Organizing 35 Million**

At the last convention of the American Federation of Labor, representatives of some of the most important unions in the country — especially the United Mine Workers of America, pointed out very clearly what we Communists have always stressed, namely, that unions based on the present craft unions cannot organize the millions of unorganized workers in the basic mass production industries. *The issue of industrial unionism is therefore fundamentally the issue of organizing the 35 million unorganized workers.* Those trade union leaders who stubbornly refuse to modernize the organizational structure and policies of the A. F. of L. so that it can meet the needs of trade union organization in the giant industries of the big trusts, are in reality refusing to organize the unorganized.

*They wish to continue the split in the working class which keeps tens of millions of workers out of the A. F. of L.* Such policies help the big capitalists who fight all attempts of the working class to organize, and aid in driving masses of workers into the company unions. *This split in the working class*

drives down wages and worsens the working conditions of all toilers, not only of the unorganized and unskilled workers, but also of the organized and skilled. Instead of united action by the working class against its common enemy, there is the forced competition of worker against worker.

*The reactionary trade union leaders — the Wolls, Whartons and Hutchesons and their Man Friday, William Green, who fight against the development of industrial unionism, are fighting against the organization of the unorganized and are thus perpetuating everything that is backward and narrow in the labor movement.* Like true reactionaries, they attack the best interests of the labor movement in the name of “the holiness of charter rights.” In these actions they are imitating the reactionary role of the Supreme Court, which in the name of “constitutional rights” says that the government does not have the right to give any help to the distressed masses, although these same judges do not think it “unconstitutional” when this same government spends billions to swell the profits of the rich.

### **Shouting “Split”**

These reactionary trade union leaders, faced with the growing challenge of the workers to their policy, are resorting to an old trick. It is they who shout—Split! They who are the real wreckers and splitters, appeal to the workers in the name of unity to abandon their fight for industrial unionism.

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Everywhere, the reactionary forces are coming to the aid of these bankrupt bureaucrats. The "Old Guard" in the Socialist Party is no longer able to sit on both chairs. They can no longer cover up their retreat in the name of unity as contained in Algernon Lee's statement in the *New Leader*: "There is nothing sacred about the form of organization." They are now openly demanding surrender to the craft union policies, echoing the charge that "the miners are creating a split in the labor movement" and threatening Lewis that "unless he desists from this attitude, he may find himself alone."

That the issue of industrial unionism involves the fundamental problem of organizing the unorganized is just a mere trifle, something of no importance to these apologists for the Executive Council of the A. F. of L. These "labor bourbons" are not concerned with the fact that without organizing the unorganized we cannot beat back the fascist drive of the reactionary Liberty Leaguers and Hearsts.

During the last two weeks, there have been two important gatherings—the meeting of the Executive Council of the A. F. of L. and the National Convention of the U.M.W.A.—which have further clarified the issue and emphasized the tasks of those who really wish to build a powerful labor movement in the United States.

The Executive Council, refusing to listen to the demands of millions of trade unionists for the adoption of industrial union policies, has taken additional steps to cripple the fight to organize the

unorganized and to build industrial unions in the mass production industries. The Council demanded the liquidation of the Committee for Industrial Organization. They refused a national charter to 30,000 radio workers organized in Federal locals, giving jurisdiction over these workers to the International Union of Electrical Workers. They ordered skilled workers and even whole locals in the auto industry to be turned over to the Machinists Union. They ordered the Brewery Workers Union to turn over whole sections of their membership to the Teamsters Union.

### *The Sailors' Union*

In line with these splitting policies, the bureaucrats at the head of the International Seamen's Union, meeting in Washington at their national convention just at the time the A. F. of L. Council made these decisions, revoked the charters of the "Sailors' Union of the Pacific." They did this because the seamen had joined with other maritime unions in creating the Pacific Coast Maritime Federation—which although not an industrial union is a way of achieving united action by the workers in the entire industry—in order to present a common front and conduct a common fight against the ship owners. These bureaucrats, collaborating with the ship owners, are attempting to disrupt all the marine unions on the Pacific Coast. If their disruptive attempt is successful, they would weaken the entire trade union movement on the Pacific Coast, as well



as the unions in the marine industry throughout the country.

We have here a very clear picture of the splitting policy of the Executive Council. It is a policy of division, of "rule or ruin." The results of this splitting policy were also glaringly seen in the recent strike of the Motor Products workers in Detroit. There a representative of the Executive Council, Francis Dillon, as a result of his opposition to industrial unionism and democracy within the union, finally resorted to open strikebreaking, thus discrediting the A. F. of L. instead of uniting all auto workers into a strong industrial union within the A. F. of L.

### *Against Rank and File*

*All these decisions mean that the Executive Council has issued a declaration of war against the interests of the rank and file of the industrial unions, as well as those of the rank and file of the entire trade union movement.* These decisions serve only the interests of the open-shoppers and the most arrogant reactionary groups in the country. They must be resisted to the utmost by all those who wish to fight for the interests of the workers.

The national convention of the United Mine Workers of America unanimously decided to fight this arrogant challenge of the Executive Council. We welcome this decision which our adherents in the convention supported.

The action of the A. F. of L. Executive Council

in delivering an ultimatum to the U.M.W.A. Convention, demanding the dissolution of the Committee for Industrial Organization, constitutes a threat to split the American trade union movement, as seen in the Seamen's Union. Would the A. F. of L. Council succeed in this attempt, it would divide the ranks of the workers, in the face of advancing capitalist reaction, and thereby encourage the exploiters of labor to intensify their attacks upon the working class. It would jeopardize the progress of the industrial union movement and the organization of the unorganized.

### *A Struggle for All Workers*

The Communist Party calls upon the rank and file workers everywhere to defeat the Executive Council splitters, not by capitulating to them, as the "Old Guard" Socialists propose, but by isolating them, and thus achieve a united American Federation of Labor upon the basis of industrial unionism and the organization of the unorganized.

If there is any weakness in the action of the U.M.W.A., it does not lie in the sharp rebuke that the miners gave to the arbitrary decisions of the Executive Council and to its front man, Mr. Green, about which the "Old Guard" Socialists shed such bitter tears. Their answer was the only answer that the powerful Miners' Union could have and should have given to the Executive Council. The convention of miners could not accept the decisions for the liquidation of the Committee for Industrial Organ-



ization. Correctly, the miners encouraged the radio workers, the auto workers, the brewery workers, the marine workers, to resist the decisions of the Executive Council which would break up and destroy their organization. The weakness of the action of the miners' convention lies rather in the fact that the leaders of the U.M.W.A. did not sufficiently emphasize this struggle as a struggle of all workers in all unions, craft and industrial, who fight for industrial unionism and greater labor solidarity in all questions, and did not yet sufficiently mobilize the masses of all A. F. of L. unions against the reactionary splitting policy of the A. F. of L.

Only if the Committee for Industrial Organization is further cemented and strengthened, and if there is an end to all wavering in their ranks, if there is developed, on the *basis of a bold drive forward*, a collective leadership and a collective working out of all policies by all the unions in the bloc, if they gather to themselves other unions both industrial and craft, if they mobilize the rank and file in the *entire* A. F. of L., if they encourage the development of real workers' democracy in all unions—especially in the unions that make up the industrial bloc—only if all these things are done will the progressive forces in the quickest and most decisive way defeat the reactionaries. *Above all, they must undertake immediately to organize the unorganized workers.*

The "Old Guard" Socialists are trying to force some leaders of the Committee for Industrial Or-

ganization to yield to the threats of Green, Woll and Company. They must be warned that this would only give the maximum help to the splitting policy of the Executive Council.

### *Trade Union Democracy*

We must emphasize that an indispensable weapon in the fight for industrial unionism is genuine trade union democracy. This means holding conventions regularly, it means freedom of discussion, the democratic election of all officers, and the use of democratic methods so that the membership can decide on all questions. This further means the stamping out of all forms of racketeering and gangsterism which still infest many sections of the labor movement.

Without real trade union democracy, there also developed a situation which permitted Hutcheson—the reactionary leader of the Carpenters' Union—to speak and vote against industrial unionism in the name of 200,000 carpenters. He spoke against the real wishes of his own members, whom he has not permitted to hold a convention for eight years, and who have not had the opportunity to vote on this or any other important issue facing the trade union movement.

We are certain that if the members of the existing craft unions were only given the opportunity to vote, they would decide overwhelmingly in favor of industrial unionism. The fight for industrial unionism and for a strong and united A. F. of L. demands



that the fight is carried into every craft union. But if the members of the craft unions are to be won over to the side of industrial unionism, then they must be shown the example of how genuine trade union democracy is practiced in the industrial unions which make up the Committee for Industrial Organization. It was on this point that the convention of the U.M.W.A. showed a great weakness. Is there any real reason why John L. Lewis should have kept the miners from having the right to elect their own district officials? If the leaders of the U.M.W.A. had restored full democracy to their membership, they would have greatly strengthened the fight for industrial unionism.

The U.M.W.A. convention made a serious mistake when it went on record for the support of President Roosevelt. For this John L. Lewis is especially responsible. This action cannot help the miners, nor will it help the rest of the working class. It will not help to strengthen the fight for industrial unionism. Instead, this action carries with it the danger of making the U.M.W.A. and other unions the tail to the capitalist, strikebreaking and corrupt Democratic Party.

### *Contrary to Workers' Interest*

The U. M. W. A. convention was progressive where it broke with the old reactionary policies of the Executive Council of the A. F. of L., as on the issue of industrial unionism. Where it adhered to the old Green-Woll policies, even if in a new form,

when it endorsed Roosevelt, it took a position which is contrary to the interests of the working class. We Communists, while supporting aggressively the struggle for industrial unionism, will in the most comradely manner but without any hesitation try to do all in our power to convince the miners and the other workers of the dangers of the U.M.W.A. action of endorsing Roosevelt, and to prove to them that in the present situation only a Farmer-Labor Party can serve to unite the working class against the growing menace of reaction and fascism.

### *Immediate Tasks*

The Central Committee of the Communist Party urges all Communists, all progressives, all other honest workers, whether they belong to craft or industrial unions, to carry through the following immediate tasks:

1. There should be a storm of resolutions from every local union, City Central body, District Trades Council, endorsing the policy of industrial unionism, and protesting against the order of the Executive Council which splits up the auto workers, brewery workers and radio workers and demands the dissolution of the Committee for Industrial Organization. They should protest and resist the expulsion by the reactionary officials of the International Seamen's Union, of 13,000 seamen on the Pacific Coast. We especially urge the members of the craft unions to raise their voices and demand that in their unions there should be a democratically conducted refer-



endum, or special convention, which will decide upon these questions of industrial unionism.

2. Steps should be taken to initiate and to give full organizational, financial and moral support for a campaign to organize the unorganized in Steel, Auto, Radio, Metal Mining, Rubber, Chemicals, Agriculture, and all other unorganized workers, giving special attention to the need for winning the Negro workers into the trade unions.

3. Steps should also be taken to organize the resistance of the workers against wage cuts, for wage increases and for maximum support to every strike of workers for better conditions. At this moment, the impending strike of 100,000 dressmakers must be given full support, and its success must be used to stimulate the organization of all unorganized workers.

4. Maximum support must be given to the struggles of the unemployed for relief and for union wages on all W.P.A. Projects. They must join in the fight for social unemployment insurance, supporting the Frazier-Lundeen Bill, thus developing the unity of the employed and unemployed, and strengthening the united front of the working class against the attacks of the bosses.

5. To strengthen the fight against the offensive of the capitalists, the Communists, Socialists and all progressive-minded workers should take the lead in working out concrete measures which will unite the efforts of the various craft unions in the different industries and which will lead to joint struggles for

improved conditions and for uniform action in the working out and control of agreements. In this way we can convince the workers in the craft unions that the fight for industrial unionism does not weaken their unions, but on the contrary it strengthens their own position. In this practical way we can take the first steps leading to the amalgamation of the various craft unions in the different industries, which is the road for these unions to a more suitable and more effective industrial solidarity.

6. Communists, Socialists, and all class-conscious workers must now, more than ever, when the fundamental issues confronting the working class are confused by the demagogy of the reactionaries and the different capitalist groups and parties, carry forward the banner of *independent working class action—the fight for a Farmer-Labor Party*.

*Against the splitting policies of the A. F. of L. Council!*

*For a united A. F. of L. based on industrial unions!*

*For trade union democracy!*

*For a militant fight against the capitalists!*

*For a Farmer-Labor Party!*

FOR THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF  
THE COMMUNIST PARTY, U. S. A.  
WILLIAM Z. FOSTER, *Chairman*,  
EARL BROWDER, *General Secretary*.



You have read this pamphlet. You can easily see how important for the labor movement a real distribution of this pamphlet would be. We cannot depend upon the press controlled by labor-enemies to make known the contents of this booklet. It becomes a duty for every right thinking man and woman in the labor movement to take it upon himself to become a means of distributing this message, "For a Powerful United American Federation of Labor". You can get quantities of this pamphlet at any of the book shops listed on page 2 or direct from

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